

New Haven Public Schools

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON VARIOUS BILLS

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee, my name is Richard Therrien and I am the K-12 Science Supervisor for the New Haven Public Schools. I am here today to testify on behalf of Dr. Reginald Mayo, Superintendent of New Haven Public Schools, regarding several bills on today's agenda.

In brief, we support S.B. No. 440 AAC School Districts and Teacher Performance Programs.

We have concerns about S.B. No. 442 AAC Boards of Education, H.B. No. 5489 AAC Secondary School Reform, and H.B. No. 5492 AAC Revisions to the Accountability Statutes.

Of the bill we support:

House Bill No. 440, AAC School Districts and Teacher Performance Programs. We welcome the addition of post secondary education data in order to further support and inform our district efforts to prepare and track our students. We also would suggest adding language to require districts and the state to immediately report and share student enrollment and performance data when students change from one school system to another.

Of the bills where we have concerns:

We strongly oppose Raised Bill 442 allowing for the reconstitution of a local board of education by the commissioner of education.

We have concerns about Raised Bill 5492 and 5489 which address Secondary School Reform. New Haven Public Schools support the efforts to modify and reform secondary schools, especially to improve graduation rates and ensure the academic and personal success of every student. We are especially interested in models that develop curriculum and high school courses that encourage intra, inter and cross disciplinary courses that are focused on engaging students and providing them with the skills they will need in the future. Nonetheless, we are concerned that this plan contains several unfunded mandates that would be difficult to implement at the district level that would meet that goal. The proposed credit requirements focus on seat time in individual traditional specialized courses, and we respectfully submit that a comprehensive secondary school reform package needs to embrace a focus on designing new ways of looking at traditional curriculum.

We support the increased requirements for mathematics, science, world language, and health courses, as well as a senior capstone project, community service, college credit, and online coursework, but have concerns about some of the specific courses and actions recommended.

1) For example, we support Biology as a required course, but have concerns about using this as the basis for an end of course exam. Chemistry is an important course for all students to take, and may be more appropriate. There also needs to be flexibility to allow schools that offer a high quality specialized science program, such as our magnet Sound School, and other vo-ag schools, and our planned engineering high school, which had hoped to offer more cross disciplinary math, science, and engineering course.

2) Of great concern is the plan to keep the CAPT test in the middle of 10th grade in Science, Math, Reading and Writing, and also to test those subjects with end of course exams, some of which would typically be given in the same year (Biology, Geometry, English II). There needs to be specification that the end of course exam and model curriculum matches the performance standards of the curriculum for the CAPT test, so that schools are forced to follow two sets of testing standards, and if possible, students should not be required to take two high stakes tests in the same year.

3) With additional science and technology courses, the state will need to examine certification to make sure that those teachers are available as this has historically been a shortage area. With additional science and technology courses, there will need to be additional funding to purchase equipment and labs.

4) To ensure that all students have detailed individualized plans will require an investment in retraining and hiring pupil specialists, such as guidance counselors, especially in the middle school.

If plans for secondary school reform are to involve priority and urban districts specifically, we would welcome the opportunity to collaborate on designing these options.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.